



COMMISSION ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council on the FY 11 Operating Budget

April 8, 2010

Bill Gray, Chair – Jerry Godwin, Vice-Chair

Good Evening, my name is Bill Gray and I am speaking on behalf of the Commission on Veterans Affairs. As the newest HHS Commission, we appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of our top priorities for the upcoming year. We recognize that the County is in a severe budget crisis but we ask that you provide or coordinate with the Veterans Health Administration for critically needed mental health services for persons with mental health and substance abuse problems. Before using County dollars, we recommend that you set in place practices to take advantage of any and all federally funded programs by the Department of Veterans Affairs or other federal programs.

- Require departments to identify on the intake form if the individual or any immediate family member ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces, National Guard or Reserves, so that they all can be assessed for state and federal programs that they may be eligible for such as respite care for families with children who have developmental disabilities, or home care for veterans who are seniors. This includes and is not limited to HHS, police, and corrections.
- The County HOC apply to receive Veterans Administration Supported Housing {VASH} vouchers directly from the VA. We understand that there was difficulty in accurately reflecting the total number of Veterans living in shelters and those who are living in the woods to support receiving these VASH vouchers.
- Require all departments to apply for federal grants/seek out partnerships with the private and non-profit sector which would benefit Veterans, their spouses and children. Ideally, it will bring money and/or jobs to Montgomery County.
- We recommend that the County work with the Veterans Health Administration to establish a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in the County to provide medical and psychiatric care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Traumatic Brain Injury, the most prevalent mental/behavioral health disorders among service members returning from overseas deployment, in the community, not just at VA hospitals. This CBOC would also provide the same services and coordinate the care with the VA through screening. Hopefully, this CBOC would include a full time "Service Organization" benefits claims counselor.
- We recommend that the County work to help establish a Veterans Court program in Montgomery County. This type of court rehabilitates veterans in place of incarceration and the County can look to Erie, New York for program guidelines.
- We have worked with the Commission on People with Disabilities and supported a bill, now law, which establishes a hiring preference for veterans and persons with disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. Please let us know how we can be of assistance.

